



Transcript - Minimizing Barriers

Once we know the barriers to help-seeking, we can choose programs, policies, and practices that will minimize these barriers and increase students' ability to identify and utilize the supports that they need. Keep in mind that most campuses aren't able to offer all of these approaches, and adding new strategies can take time. We recommend that you choose the options that are a good fit for your campus, and map out a plan that is doable, given your staff and resources.

To address Limited Options, a campus can:

- Annually educate faculty and staff about the range of options available and how to refer students. Provide a quick guide for employees that includes a decision tree or other device for making student referrals, helping them to know when counseling is an appropriate option versus referring to other campus supports.
- Likewise, help students see the range of options for getting help, by creating a similar decision tree or guide to finding support that can be prominently displayed on your counseling center and student services' websites.
- Offer online self-help, psychoeducational, and virtual mental health services. Several quality third-party programs are available to campuses for a minimal cost per student. For some students, online services can meet their needs for support; for others, they can be a bridge to more formal or in-person help, allowing the student to explore the idea of getting help before having to engage with someone else.
- Explore what additional services your campus may have the capacity to provide. Can you provide training and oversight of a peer support program? Are there psychoeducational workshops or webinars someone on your campus can offer, to provide students with basic coping skills? Or, perhaps your campus has the ability to hire a case manager, who can help students identify a greater range of options for support both on campus and in the community.

To address gaps in knowledge, a campus can:

- Promote student support options year-round. Don't assume that students will remember what they heard during new student orientation. Share information regularly about how to access resources through the campus website, e-mails, social media, faculty syllabi, advising offices, and posters in high-traffic locations.



- To support students who do need counseling, use your website and campus presentations to explain what's involved and how confidentiality works. For some students, counseling is an intimidating mystery. They have questions about what will be expected of them, who will find out their personal information, and if their parents will be contacted. If they've never come into the physical space where counseling is provided, they may find it too overwhelming to do so. Help students envision what it might be like by offering tours or sharing a video on your website of the counseling center. Describe the scheduling and intake process and show them the forms they will be asked to complete. Remind them that many students find relief after just a few sessions.
- Also, have counselors, case managers, and other student support staff promote services, offer educational workshops, and take on other campus roles where they are active and visible to students. This allows students to get to know them, value their presence, and trust them as members of the community. Alternatively, you can create a video for your website where these staff can introduce themselves, or include their pictures and bios on the counseling center and student services' websites. Students will be more likely to reach out for help if they know the people with whom they will be interacting.
- Finally, we can educate students about health insurance. Many are in charge of their medical care for the first time and do not understand how to identify providers within their network, what co-pays and deductibles are, or what information is shared with the policyholder when insurance is used. In your referral list of community providers, be sure to include services that accept the various insurance types held by your students, as well as places that offer a sliding scale for those without adequate insurance.

To address individual attitudes that discourage help-seeking, a campus can:

- Develop social marketing campaigns that promote help-seeking as a strength and a characteristic of successful students. Testimonials from students who found various supports such as psychoeducational workshops, tutoring, or counseling beneficial in overcoming challenges can help students to reframe negative attitudes. Share whatever data you have on positive outcomes. Stories and data, in combination, are a great way to educate others.
- Use a social norms approach, similar to that used in substance use education, to help students develop more realistic perceptions about mental health among students. Share data such as the actual rates of stigma, student use of counseling and other support services, and experiences of adversity among students. Such an approach can normalize help-seeking and correct misperceptions that deter students from seeking needed support.
- Have administration, faculty, and staff help shape the campus climate through intentional communications and actions of support. Messages from top administrators emphasizing the importance of seeking help and utilizing campus resources when needed can influence student behavior. Faculty can promote resources and share messages about the importance of addressing problems early.



Advisors can regularly check-in with students about self-care and emotional well-being. Faculty, staff, and administrator attendance at and support of campus events related to mental health also communicate the importance of the topic.

- Finally, provide sponsors and administrative oversight for student-led mental health organizations, such as Active Minds or NAMI on Campus. These groups can help positively shape the campus culture around mental health. Students educate their peers about resources available for support and encourage help-seeking, thus improving student perceptions of mental health issues and reducing stigma.

To address a lack of perceived need for mental health support, a campus can:

- Offer opportunities for students to assess their own mental health and compare their results to peer norms. This can be done through online screening assessments linked to the counseling center or wellness education websites. When problems are identified, provide alternatives for how students can address those difficulties, empowering them to seek help in a way that is most comfortable to them.
- Provide workshops, presentations, tabling, and educational materials on how to spot someone who might need extra help. These can help students distinguish between typical challenges faced by college students versus distress that indicates a more serious problem.
- And, we can regularly conduct psychoeducational programming to teach students about mental health concerns, when counseling is appropriate, what other types of supports are available, and the effectiveness of counseling as well as other interventions.

To address accessibility concerns about counseling services, a campus can:

- Use creative scheduling for staff, to offer services across a wider range of times, including outside of the traditional work week schedule.
- Make available telehealth appointments with healthcare and counseling providers, as well as virtual appointments with other support staff and offices, such as financial aid, residence life, tutoring, disability services, and case managers.
- Designate some time each week for walk-in counseling services or drop-in consultation and referral sessions. A walk-in appointment allows a student to “test the waters”, without having to be placed on a long waiting list. On-demand services also help reduce no-shows for new patients. Brief consultation appointments provide an opportunity for students to seek support who have a specific problem, who are concerned about a friend, or who are just uninterested in ongoing counseling to seek guidance.
- Provide services in various locations across campus, particularly if your campus is large or spread out. Some campuses have had great success offering services in dorms or academic buildings, in addition to the counseling center.



Alternate locations can also be useful as walk-in sites for consultation appointments or for brief interventions focused on identifying and using coping skills.

- Offer low or no cost alternative service formats, such as web-based therapeutic, psychoeducational, and peer-support programs, apps oriented towards emotional wellness, a self-help resource library, and information about community-based support groups. Widely share information on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Crisis Text Line, as well as local warmlines for non-emergency support. These options offer students flexibility and easy access, without substantial costs.
- Finally, identify community providers who offer a sliding scale fee structure. Share that information with students when making a referral to services outside of the university.

Lastly, to address students' cultural concerns, a campus can:

- Offer tailored prevention and mental health promotion outreach programs to groups who underutilize your support services. For example, some international students may not be receptive to traditional mental healthcare. However, they might instead be engaged through workshops on effective communication and developing intercultural friendships, which are unique challenges they encounter.
- Hire diverse counselors and student service personnel who represent many of the different identities found in your student population. Additionally, all counseling and student services staff should engage in regular trainings in cultural humility and providing culturally appropriate services.
- Include testimonials from diverse students or public figures about the benefits of getting help in your promotional campaigns. Students are more likely to believe in the value of services if they identify with and trust the messenger. Your campus may have a student mental health club that can identify diverse student ambassadors who are willing to share their stories of overcoming mental health challenges.
- Seek input from underserved groups of students on what types of supports are most appealing to them. For example, some students may prefer peer-led support groups. Other groups might be more receptive to activity-based therapies, wellness-focused social media posts, or psychoeducational programming hosted by a religious or cultural center. Be flexible and find culturally acceptable ways to meet the diverse needs of your students.

We've outlined a few ideas for addressing common barriers to help-seeking among college students. There may be other unique barriers on your campus that you need to address. However, there is one important caveat to this component of a comprehensive plan: if our goal is to increase help-seeking, we must have the capacity to provide that additional help. Therefore, counseling centers and community providers must be ready for a potential increase in clients. Because help doesn't always occur in the form of individual therapy appointments, we can also build capacity to help students with groups, online psychoeducational programs, peer-support programs, and wellness-based workshops.



Nevertheless, if your campus is having trouble meeting your current demand for mental health services, you should first focus your efforts on building service capacity before using these approaches to increase help-seeking.

Mental health struggles are often invisible to others. While some students eventually will be identified through behavioral difficulties, academic struggles, or interpersonal challenges, many will go unnoticed until they reach out for help. Even when a student's challenges are recognized, we can't force them to get help. By using strategies like those we've covered in this video, we can create a campus climate that empowers students to seek out the help they need to overcome those challenges and succeed on campus and beyond.